August 22, 2025

Texas University Boards Abolish Faculty Senates, Create Toothless Councils

Two Houston professors have responded to Texas lawmakers' assault on independent faculty governance by creating their own faux faculty senate.

By Emma Whitford

Some university systems are letting their existing faculty senates lapse while others are reshaping them to comply with SB 37.

Photo illustration by Justin Morrison/Inside Higher Ed | BraunS, malerapaso and vi73777/iStock/Getty Images

The University of Texas System Board of Regents voted Thursday to disband the system's long-standing faculty senates in compliance with Senate Bill 37, the sweeping Texas higher education law that gives university boards and presidents control over faculty governing bodies.

The UT board also voted Thursday to create faculty advisory groups, which will "perform the work of faculty governance bodies"—such as reviewing degree requirements, suggesting curricular changes, coordinating campus events and revising the faculty handbook—while keeping all decision-making power in the hands of the administration.

The University of Houston system Board of Regents did the same Thursday, voting to

create faculty councils that will “provide structured, meaningful avenues for faculty to help shape academic priorities, strengthen excellence and contribute to decisions that guide our future,” a university spokesperson said in a statement.

Most Popular

Brown Professor Suspects Most of His Class Used AI to Cheat

Seattle U Dismisses Professor Who Criticized Provost

ICE Detains HBCU Baseball MVP

But the groups won’t give the faculty independent representation or any real power. In accordance with SB 37, the board bylaws now state, “a faculty council is advisory only and may not be delegated the final decision-making authority on any matter.”

As of June 20, any faculty governing body in Texas—whether it’s a senate, council or advisory group—may not exceed 60 members unless otherwise decided by the board, and every college or school within the university must be represented by at least two members, SB 37 dictates. The university president will appoint at least one of the representatives from each college or school within the institution, while the faculty elects the others, meaning that as many as 30 members could be chosen by the president.

The president will also choose the presiding officer, associate presiding officer and secretary for each group. Appointees may serve for six years before taking a mandatory two-year break from the group, while faculty-elected representatives may only serve for two years before the two-year break.

While the new groups are still faculty bodies, they won’t “authentically speak with the faculty voice,” said Mark Criley, a senior program officer in the department of academic freedom, tenure and governance at the American Association of University Professors. “No matter who is selected, the process by which they’re selected matters. We learned when we’re in elementary school—the teacher didn’t appoint the class president, the principal didn’t appoint them, this was one of our first exercises in representation. You

choose the people who will speak for you in an institutional body."

Across the state, college and university system boards are taking different approaches to scrapping and reshaping their faculty senates. The Alamo Colleges District Board of Trustees voted earlier this month to consolidate the faculty senates at each of the five campuses into one group of up to 35 members. Previously, the five senates comprised 114 voting members.

While the Texas State University system board gave presidents the ability to create new faculty groups, it did not approve a new faculty governing body at its Aug. 14 meeting and will let the existing senate lapse on Sept. 1, the deadline set by SB 37. Texas A&M University regents are expected to vote on their approach to the new law at their Aug. 27 board meeting, *The Austin American-Statesman* reported.

Even as university governing boards design their toothless, SB 37–compliant groups, two professors at the University of Houston on Monday unveiled what they're calling the Faux Faculty Senate. "I know that people feel that faculty senates are kind of arcane … but it's a part of civil society," said David Mazella, an associate professor in the English Department at the University of Houston and president-elect of the faux senate. "[SB 37] is an antidemocratic bill that essentially eliminates the faculty voice in order for the state to directly control what we do."

The faux senate is largely symbolic; it won't replicate any of the governing functions of the now-defunct 100-member senate, Mazella said. Instead, it will serve as an off-campus meet-up for faculty to socialize and talk about ongoing issues in Texas higher education. "Even getting to a faculty cafe is really difficult, so giving people an opportunity [to talk] that is not in a university space feels really important to us," Mazella said.

He and his co-creator, María González, also an associate professor of English at Houston, plan to start hosting events in October, though nothing concrete has been scheduled. Without support from the university, the money to host these events will come from Mazella's and González's own pockets. They're looking for a space in the Houston area that's "not too gross, but not too expensive," said Mazella, for their first faux senate convening.